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Lending a hand in Haiti



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Mike Stoebner calls mission visit to impoverished nation 'best trip ever'

Lending a hand in Haiti Stillwater Gazette - Stillwater Minnesota - By Avery Cropp on November 15, 2012 - Mike Stoebner of Grant wasn't too sure about traveling to Haiti when his friend, Joyce Getchell, asked him to accompany her on a recent trip with her late uncle, the Rev. Bernard Reiser's relief organization Reiser Relief.

But for Stoebner, it turned out to be the best trip ever.

"I wasn't sure about it at first because I didn't know anything about Haiti. I didn't know the safety level either. I've been to other third world countries but I was more shocked by the level of poverty in the country," Stoebner said.



"Before I got there I thought that there were a billion things to do there and we couldn't possibly make a difference. But you

do all you can do and you make a difference for one or two people and it's better than doing nothing."

The goal of Reiser Relief, an organization started in the late 1990s, is helping the people of Haiti

"The organization is aimed towards helping with education, clean water, food and housing," Getchell, of Forest Lake, said.

"We take care of everyone from little babies to elderly individuals and abandoned women. There's a cradle-to-grave interest because that's really what my uncle dedicated his life to. He touched a lot of lives before passing away in December (27, 2011)."



Stoebner and the 11-member mission team of 11 returned home Oct. 29 after being in Haiti for eight action-packed days.



Their first full day was spent on water trucks owned by the non-profit group. Those trucks go to Cite Soleil in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, six days a week throughout the year, providing the 300,000 individuals in the slum with clean and safe water. The volunteers also visited schools, hospitals and other facilities that care for elderly people.

“One day was completely different from



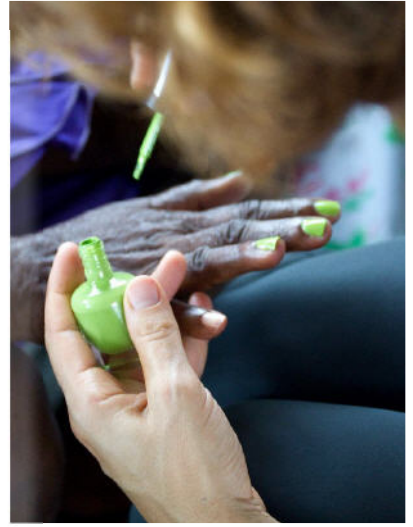
another and it was different than the day before, and everyone was just so appreciative,” Stoebner said.



“When we went to check on the elderly, in the Village of Jesus, our foundation’s first project that cares for elderly and abandoned women, it was a

fantastic day,” Getchell said. “The women there are cared for by nuns and it was fantastic. We sang with the people there and danced with the people there and did their nails and gave them a massage with lotion.”

Stoebner remembered the day at the hospital very clearly. He said the parents who come to visit their sick kids every day were appreciative of what Reiser Relief volunteers do because they know that if they can’t make it their kids will not go through the day without a comforting and caring hand.



“There was one situation where I was holding a little girl, and walking around with her and feeding her. All of a sudden she started crying and crying. I tried everything to get her to stop and when I turned around and looked at her crib her mom was there smiling at me,” Stoebner said “The little girl’s mom hadn’t said anything or I would’ve given



her to her right away, but she was just so happy and thankful that I was there taking care of her kid.”

Overall, the busy schedule stayed relatively on track although it was interrupted by the edge of Hurricane Sandy. But the mission team didn’t know that at the time.

“It’s kind of funny in Haiti that

you’re so out of touch with news and media,” It was just raining a lot though we found out later that it was Sandy,” Getchell said.

“We were out of contact with the world and we got tons of emails from people saying, ‘Are you okay?’ There was lots of rain and blowing wind, but it didn’t seem like a hurricane





to us,” Stoeber said. “But as we started driving we noticed that floods and washouts were huge and people were standing on the road.

There were lines of people standing on the highway in the hurricane because they had nowhere else to go. There was no evacuation plan, no transportation and entire villages were wiped out. It was just mile after mile of people standing in the

rain.”

Getchell had said what they witnessed really spoke to the fragility of the country and reinforced the importance of the foundation.

Haiti has little to no infrastructure, so rivers turned into torrents, and people were instantly displaced from their tin shacks and tent homes.

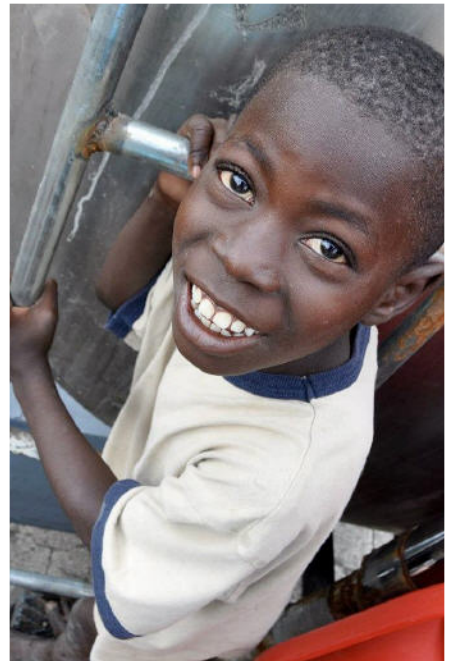




“As far as weather, it rained on and off for four days straight,” Getchell said. “But during one day when we had to do most of our work outside, it was bizarre, but the rain stopped on and off as we started working outside and delivering food like God was closing heaven as we went about our day to let us do what we had to do.”

Both Stoeбner and Getchell said Haiti, despite its poverty, is full of joyous and positive people. Getchell loves the country and Stoeбner is already making plans to go back.

“I love (Haiti). I love the spirit of the country, and they’re so rich in spirit and faith. Many people have no one to rely on but God, and signs of faith are displayed on everything,” Getchell said. “You can walk down the street and say Glory to God and they will raise their fist and say the



same. The people of Haiti are rich in many ways and we have a lot to learn from them.”

“They don’t lie when they say you will never be the same after a trip like this,” Stoebner said.

To learn more about Reiser Relief, or to get involved check out their website: www.reiserrelief.org

